

OPENING STATEMENT

Chairman Jared Huffman

Subcommittee on Water, Oceans, and Wildlife

Committee on Natural Resources

Oversight Hearing: Examining the President's

Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Proposal for the

U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and U.S. Geological Survey

May 16, 2019

Opening Statement

Thank you for joining us today for a hearing to examine the President's Fiscal Year 2020 budget proposal for the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation and the water section of the U.S. Geological Survey.

The work done by these agencies is incredibly important to our nation's communities and economies, and I'm glad we can spend some time today with leadership from both agencies.

The Bureau of Reclamation is the largest wholesale water supplier in the United States and the nation's second largest producer of hydropower. Reclamation's built infrastructure includes 338 reservoirs and thousands of miles of canals that deliver water to tens of millions of people.

The U.S. Geological Survey develops and disseminates water data that helps us understand and operate water systems across the nation. This important data is collected from 1.9 million water supply and water quality data collection sites across the country.

In short, both Reclamation and USGS do vital work to secure and manage the American water supply.

In the coming years, both agencies will face great challenges to their ability to continue this work for the American people.

Reclamation's water managers must contend with aging infrastructure, increasingly frequent and severe drought, and extreme weather events exacerbated by climate change.

Meanwhile, USGS must continue to supply our nation with crucial scientific information in the face of a rapidly changing environment across many parts of our country.

In some cases, the Administration's FY2020 budget reflects an understanding of these agencies' responsibilities and the challenges they face.

For instance, Reclamation has recommended a 40% increase in funding for facility maintenance and rehabilitation. Increased funding here is certainly needed to address Reclamation's multibillion-dollar backlog of extraordinary and deferred maintenance needs.

But, in other cases, this budget reflects a jarring dismissal of Reclamation's imperative to adapt to the challenges of increasingly frequent and severe drought.

Take, for instance, a requested 83% cut to the popular WaterSMART program, including a 95% cut to the Title XVI Water Reuse and Recycling Program. The water projects supported by these programs can provide a virtually drought-proof water supply for tens of millions of people if they are equipped with sufficient funding, yet their funding is slashed to the bone in this budget.

I am also concerned by proposed cuts that would impact tribal and rural water supplies.

Reclamation has proposed to keep Indian water settlement funding either flat or, in some cases, proposed to decrease funding. I would like to hear more today about whether the funding proposed will allow the federal government to meet the terms and deadlines associated with congressionally authorized settlements.

Reclamation's budget also proposes a 79 percent cut for the design and construction of rural water projects, despite the fact that Reclamation has identified a \$1.3 billion backlog for authorized rural water projects. These projects will take decades to complete at the proposed funding levels, which is simply unacceptable.

While the President talks a lot about rebuilding our nation's infrastructure, this budget shows an apparent disconnect. The Committee hopes to hear why Reclamation thinks it is appropriate to slash funding for infrastructure and 21st Century water projects that can help prevent future water shortages for American communities.

Other proposed budget items require increased transparency.

The Department of the Interior's reorganization is factored into the budgets for both Reclamation and USGS. But the budgets are vague in their descriptions of how that money will be spent. This Committee has pressed for details and has not yet received needed information from the Administration. Given that USGS has the second-largest contribution to reorganization expenses of any Interior agency, I hope that we can shed some light on the issue today.

I must also note that funding is being proposed for this ill-defined reorganization while the core work of USGS—data collection—remains deeply underfunded. Ten years ago, Congress set a requirement for USGS to expand its streamgage network to 4,700 federally-owned gages at important sites by 2019. Today, the agency is about 1,000 gages short of meeting Congress' mandate.

Fortunately, the public can rely on thousands more streamgages that are cooperatively managed by USGS and state and local partners to inform its massive data network; unfortunately, USGS has also proposed to cut funding for its role in these gages, leaving our tribal, state, and local partners in the lurch.

While the proposed cuts before us today are disappointing, it's important to note that Congress gets the last word on funding levels, and this Congress will work to fully fund critical investments to secure our nation's water supply for the future.

Before I close, I also want to say that, despite our policy differences, this Committee wants to work with Reclamation and USGS to find common ground to better manage our water resources.

We've already had one triumph in collaboration early this Congress, when this Committee worked with Reclamation and seven western states for the speedy authorization of the Colorado River Drought Contingency Plan, which helps safeguard the water supply for 40 million people.

I hope that we can continue to find common ground on the many important issues under this Subcommittee's jurisdiction.

With that, I will now recognize the Ranking Member for five minutes.